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## Troubling the Home/Land in Showtime's *Homeland*: The Ghost of 1979 and the Haunting Presence of Iran in the American Imaginary

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**ABSTRACT** In my close reading of the drama series *Homeland*, I illustrate how the divisive pull between "fascination and contempt, desire and disgust" as well as the "simultaneous embracing and disavowal" that cultural critics argue define Iranian Americanness become embodied in the character Fara, a young Muslim Iranian American woman recruited into the CIA for her language and technical skills. This essay asks, among other questions: what does it mean to have anxiety over your birthplace or ancestral homeland? What does a "simultaneous embracing and disavowal" do to a person over time? I argue that as a consequence of how her body is read, Fara is continually denied access to a home and a land and ultimately becomes discarded after performing her role as an agent of the state apparatus. In addition, this essay considers how the ghost of the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979 is frequently invited to speak as an origins myth for contact between the US and Iran that subsequently shapes the lived realities of Iranian Americans nearly forty years later.

In their introduction to the Summer 2008 issue of *Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*, Persis Karim and Nasrin Rahimieh contend that

being bombarded with unfavorable and repetitious images of and headlines about Iran and Iranians has reinforced the Iranian American community's anxieties about their national affiliation. The Iranian diaspora's simultaneous embracing and disavowal of its origins is inextricably linked to the political realities of the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries and is equally inflected by the community's desire to maintain a double allegiance to both its point of origin and its new home.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Roshanak Kheshti writes, "Iran occupies a mystified place in the Western cultural imagination, constructed as an object of fascination and contempt, desire and disgust."<sup>2</sup> In my close reading of the drama series *Homeland*, I illustrate how the divisive pull between "fascination and contempt, desire and disgust" as well as the "simultaneous embracing and disavowal" become embodied in the character Fara, a young Muslim Iranian American woman recruited into the CIA for her language and technical skills.<sup>3</sup> This essay asks, among other questions, the following: what does it mean to have anxiety over your birthplace or ancestral homeland? What does a "simultaneous embracing and disavowal" do to a person over time? I argue that as a consequence of how her body is read, Fara is continually denied access to a home and a land and ultimately becomes discarded after performing her role as an agent of the state apparatus.<sup>4</sup> In addition, this essay considers how the ghost of the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979 is frequently invited to speak as an origins myth for contact between the US and Iran that subsequently shapes the lived realities of Iranian Americans nearly forty years later.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, I frame the urgency and relevancy of representation with the language of the Supreme Court

decision on the travel ban that notably targets Iran, among other Muslim-majority countries.<sup>6</sup>

*Homeland* is an eight-time Emmy Award winning drama series that premiered on Showtime in 2011 and most recently began its seventh season in February 2018. The show was nominated in the “Outstanding Drama Series” category at the Emmy Awards for four consecutive years between 2012 to 2016. Broadly, the first two seasons focus primarily on an ex-Marine’s conversion to Islam during his time in captivity as a prisoner of war, and his subsequent acts of terrorism when he returns to the US. I use the term *subsequent* intentionally here, as his becoming Muslim is directly linked with his terrorist tendencies. The first two seasons observe the moves of terrorist organizations across borders. It is not until the third season that an entire country—specifically Iran—is named as a specific site or locus of terror. And it is in the third season that the series introduces a Muslim Iranian American female character.

While *Homeland* has received scholarly attention, the focus of those scholarly readings largely miss race and tend to be entirely “in relation to class, gender and genre.”<sup>7</sup> Most notably, in a 2015 special issue of *Cinema Journal* edited by Diane Negra and Jorie Lagerwey, the editors situate the cultural significance of the series, writing that “upon its debut in 2011, *Homeland* quickly moved to a position of cultural prominence, becoming the kind of program that anchors middle-class taste formations and cultural literacies while earning numerous accolades and drawing record-setting audiences for the cable network.”<sup>8</sup> The editors further highlight the need for a critical examination of the series because of its pertinence to the present, arguing, “*Homeland* is ultimately a trenchant political melodrama that does not seek to and never can quell the anxieties of the present moment with which it so forcefully engages.”<sup>9</sup> Within the special issue, Alex Bevan “explores the symbolic position of the single working woman” with a specific focus on the white female character, Carrie.<sup>10</sup> Lindsay Steenberg and Yvonne Tasker argue, “*Homeland* acknowledges and develops this familiar construction of a professional woman whose personal trauma underpins her role as truth seeker and law enforcer” with a similar focus on Carrie.<sup>11</sup> Invoking a class-based lens, Stephen Shapiro’s essay asks “How does the American middle class in crisis engage with television to think about its mutable position within capitalist history?”<sup>12</sup> In the issue’s article most critical of the series, James Castonguay articulates, “*Homeland* is a complicit validation of these post-9/11 insecurities that in turn contributes to the public acceptance of arguments in favor of increasing homeland security at the expense of individual rights.”<sup>13</sup> Castonguay further highlights importantly that “although not all of the Muslims in *Homeland* are terrorists, all of the terrorists are Muslims, including Sergeant Brody, whose Islamic ‘turn’ is represented as a prerequisite to becoming a terrorist.”<sup>14</sup> Though Castonguay is critical of the redundant racist trope placed upon Muslim bodies in the series, his reading focuses broadly on male characters.

It is in this absence that I offer an intersectional and critical race studies approach to explicate six significant scenes in the arc of Fara’s performance that is informed by the theoretical and intellectual contributions of Kimberlé Crenshaw.<sup>15</sup> I examine the way that Fara’s mobility is informed by her race, gender, and visible marker of her faith, as well as the legal and social structures that impact her body. My reading of Fara’s racialization and the impact this has on both her psyche and physical mobility is informed by foundational scholars in African American studies because racialization in the US always occurs within the historical imagination of whiteness and what is defined outside of its margins. As I have written elsewhere, when we think about

gendered and racialized violence against any vulnerable group in America that conversation must draw from the historical specificity of anti-blackness in the US. We cannot talk about the hateful violence as new or post-9/11. Though the circumstances and contexts differ, there is horrific commonality in both the vulnerability of certain bodies and the absence of accountability of white supremacy and anti-blackness. We must address this violence not as distinct or aberrant but as a continuation of what has been occurring to indigenous and black bodies on this soil for centuries.<sup>16</sup>

My reading is also informed by the critical scholarship of Iranian, Muslim, and Arab American scholars who have contributed extensively to the study and critique of representations of particular bodies and the legal and social consequences of these representations.<sup>17</sup> I perform close readings of scenes that include her arrival and the terror her presence incites, her attempt to linguistically align herself with the CIA, her untranslated confrontation with an Iranian double-agent, her attempt to distance herself from the CIA that results in an uninvited home visit, a conversation with her father in which she declares herself as American, and her final scene in which the participation of her family still living in Iran is demanded. I focus on these specific moments because they illustrate the peculiar and precarious space that she occupies as both a threat to the state and an agent of the state. Moreover, I argue that her pursuit of being defined as American requires a reciprocal disavowal of her Iranian heritage. Ultimately, her physical presence disrupts her ability to be recognized as American such that after she performs her role, she is discarded.

The third season of *Homeland* begins 58 days after the CIA headquarters are bombed, killing 219 Americans. Prior to her first appearance in the second episode, the audience is introduced to the alleged suspect, Majid Javadi, who is described as “the Iranian who masterminded” what it repeatedly referenced as a “second 9/11.”<sup>18</sup> Through tense and terse dialogue around a conference table, his association with the deadly attack is named as are his previous violent crimes. Shortly after, Fara arrives by taxi with her head turned so that only the back of her hijab is initially visible, and as she steps into the street her body becomes directly juxtaposed with the remains. In her first appearance on screen, her body is aligned with the devastated ruins, and as she looks around at what is left, the looming instrumentals buttress the assumption that her physical presence represents a direct contrast to the mourning that occurs in the wreckage. The haunting presence Iran specifically occupies in the American imaginary, delineated by Kheshti, as the source of both “fascination and contempt, desire and disgust,” becomes mounted onto her body in her first appearance onscreen. As she enters the CIA building the shots focus either exclusively on singular parts of her body, or in the few shots that feature her entire body, she is filmed from high above. The feeling of her being watched is tangible, as is the assumption that she should be watched. As she moves, the camera follows over her shoulder and catches the tense glances of two men passing by. As the camera angle moves upward and then back again to catch the worried glances of even more individuals passing by, the music remains tense, serious, and looming. When she moves through the security gate, with badge lifted in hand, her own awareness of this moment is clear in her body language as two men carefully observe her credentials. Her first moments onscreen establish Fara as a suspicious character in continual contrast with her surroundings. At the same time, the moment of her introduction underscores the suspicion always already placed upon Middle Eastern and Muslim bodies and by extension reveals an expectation from the audience that they will be well versed in this logic.

## Scene One

In the second episode of the season and in her first conversation with Saul Berenson, the CIA director and a protagonist that the viewer is meant to associate with, Fara's position as an outsider is verbally enunciated. Saul is the rational character that the viewers are meant to align themselves with because he embodies the ideal spectator. To borrow from Jill Dolan, "the male spectator's position is the point from which the text is most intelligible; the representation constructs the ideal (gendered) spectator at the point of its address."<sup>19</sup> His position as the ideal spectator has long been established through the series as he has operated as the singular trusted and rational mentor of the white female character, Carrie. When Fara's attempts to posit questions about their task results in an eruption, Saul speaks on behalf of the ideal spectator and announces verbally what thus far had been alluded to only through specific gazes and the music. In addition, their conversation is split completely between low-angle and high-angle shots, displaying their extreme difference in status. Saul expounds on the impossibility of perceiving Fara outside of the marker her hijab represents. In response to her initial findings that the terrorist attack did not originate in Iran, his uncharacteristically explosive response reveals a critical tension. He says,

And you know what else, while we are talking about an event that left 219 Americans dead on the ground and what you are doing about it which is apparently nothing. Forgive me. You wearing that thing on your head? It is one big fuck you to the people who would have been your coworkers except they perished in a blast right out there. So if you need to wear it, if you really need to, which is your right, you better be the best analyst that we've ever seen and don't tell me there's nothing.<sup>20</sup>

Saul's naming of "that thing on [her] head" and the swift alignment he makes between her visual presence and her worth articulates the deficit out of which Fara must climb. Fara must be exceptional, she "better be the best analyst," not because of the severity of the moment but because that is the only explanation for her presence. She cannot just complete her task; she must labor in a way that exceeds the expectation for all others because that will serve as the only rationale for her being in that space. Certainly, much attention and discussion has been focused on the image and symbol of the veil or hijab as it is most often a site of both misreading and Western fetishization.<sup>21</sup> In the scope of this essay, I want to draw attention to how through the medium of film and in the context of this television show, the hijab arrives before Fara has an opportunity to speak. By this I mean that Saul's fixation on "[her] wearing that thing on [her] head" speaks to Western and white narcissism that sees any deviation as a direct threat.

Saul's reading of the hijab reveals the way in which he posits himself as directly impacted by her personal expression of her faith. In this way, it is always about him first, not her. Moreover, he further announces the suspicion that has already been placed upon her body. I draw from Hortense Spillers's theoretical work on the myriad of terms utilized to name black female bodies as a point of entry for reading the way in which Fara has been marked. Spillers writes,

I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name . . . Embedded in bizarre axiological ground, they demonstrate a sort of telegraphic coding; they are markers so loaded with mythical prepossession that there is no easy way for the agents buried beneath them to come clean. In that regard, the names by which I am called in the public place render an example of signifying property *plus*. In order for me to speak a truer word concerning myself, I must strip down through layers of attenuated meanings.<sup>22</sup>

To be nameless and yet always already marked or defined suggests a preemptive presence. To have arrived before arriving or to have one's existence always already noticed without introduction undergirds Spillers's statement and exemplifies the way that Fara is defined. Spillers expounds upon the meanings derived from and carried by one's physicality alone. The "markers so loaded with mythical prepossession" undermine the potential to be seen, understood or read as anything beyond the confined space previously determined by a categorical naming. Although Spillers writes about black female bodies, I invoke her work here because she elaborates on how the ability to live autonomously, or define oneself independently, becomes undermined for certain bodies because their presence always already signifies something else. Though the ideological construction of the black female body in the US imaginary to which Spillers refers comes from the distinct historical context of enslavement, which differs from the Orientalist construction placed upon Fara's body, a non-black Muslim woman, Spillers produces a critical theoretical framework that allows for a grappling with the precise experience of having one's body be predefined by a white supremacist agenda without one's consent. More than that, Spillers articulates how this nonconsensual defining of one's body has severe implications on that body's mobility.

In the following scenes that I include, I argue that Fara is never able to fully "come clean" or "strip down through layers" as even in her usefulness as an agent of the state apparatus, she is never able to move away from the position of suspect. I also situate my analysis of how her body is read through the framework of Khaled Beydoun's critical definition of islamophobia. Beydoun defines islamophobia "as the presumption that Islam is inherently violent, alien, and unassimilable, a presumption driven by the belief that expressions of Muslim identity correlate with a propensity for terrorism."<sup>23</sup> This is further complicated, of course, by her positionality as a visibly Muslim woman who is confronted by the various and specific ways her body is read in public spaces. As Mona El-Ghabashy writes, "the burden of deflecting stereotypes is especially acute for Muslim women at this historical juncture, buffeted as they are by unceasing attempts to 'reform,' 'liberate,' 'uplift,' and 'empower' them by a motley crew of individuals, intuitions, and national governments."<sup>24</sup>

## Scene Two

Following Saul's islamophobic eruption, Fara attempts to prove her worth and presence; first by aligning with the agents in the CIA, and secondly by defining herself as an American capable of grieving for the individuals who were killed in the attack. Her attempt is rebuffed by the all-white and all-male legal team of the bank she is tasked with investigating. The camera angle widens to reveal a conference table with the six men in suits on one side and Saul and Fara on the other. Saul recites a series of bank transactions that involve the Islamic Republic of Iran as Fara silently passes him a piece of paper. It is only when that document is questioned that she speaks. Fara asserts,

You know your bank? It has been trafficking in human misery since the opium war. That is not an aberration, it is not a mistake, that is your business plan. You move money for embargoed governments or phony charities. Where it goes you don't want to know as long as you get your fee. But we're telling you where it went this time: into an SUV full of C4 that blew up right outside this building three months ago. You passed the blast site on your way in. We know the funds moved through your bank, we need to know where they originated.<sup>25</sup>

One man retorts, doubtfully, "*You do?*", emphasizing her difference and reminding her of her status. Fara's affirmative response is ignored as the executives leave the room while one retorts as he pushes his chair back and stands to leave: "All respect ma'am. *In this*

country that is not the way we ask for help.”<sup>26</sup> His response and their collective exit refuse her ability to mourn for the deceased, and remind her that her physical presence is distinctly marked as un-American.

The conference table and the presence of the suit-clad wall of white representatives of wealth become whiteness personified. At the moment in which their actions are questioned, a quick sleight of hand occurs as they shift focus from their culpability to their definition of her as foreign. A social construct, whiteness and its relationship to power and access become particularly salient in this scene. Michael Eric Dyson defines whiteness as “a highly adaptable and fluid force that stays on top no matter where it lands,”<sup>27</sup> and “slick and endlessly inventive. It is most effective when it makes itself invisible, when it appears neutral, human, American.”<sup>28</sup> In this particular scene, they are sitting around a table where she has a seat but she is not equal. If, as Dyson writes, “the flow of white identity into American identity” is a function of whiteness,<sup>29</sup> then this moment also illustrates what Neda Maghbouleh calls a “racial hinge” in action—closing “the door to whiteness as necessary.”<sup>30</sup> It would surprise most to know that though she is clearly racialized at this table, Fara must check “white” on every legal and government-issued document declaring her racial identity. After a series of court cases in the early 1900s, the first immigrants from the Middle East were able to gain citizenship through their status as white that was predicated primarily on their Christianity.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, all of Fara’s onscreen experiences illustrate what Maghbouleh calls a “racial loophole” in that her “legal racial categorization is inconsistent with its on-the-ground experience of racialization.” This scene both establishes a personification of whiteness and clearly defines Fara outside of its margins. Considering that this show is called *Homeland*—a direct reference to the Department of Homeland Security—we must ask several questions: what does this scene arouse in an audience and what it is meant to arouse? Is this moment meant to arouse sympathy for her treatment? Or does this moment further define her as an object of perpetual suspicion? Though she has a seat at the table and operates as an agent of the state apparatus, the banker’s quick move to cite his claims to “*this country*” is not a question of her citizenship status but rather a denial of whatever claims she might have as a citizen. In other words, when the man polices her behavior as being at odds with the US, he exhibits precisely what Dyson argues, in that there is a collapse between being white and being American. She is denied the rights of or claims to her citizenship because she will never be white and thus, she will never be American. Put differently, as Beydoun explains, “although Muslim Americans are bona fide citizens, their religious identity induces scrutiny of their citizenship status, patriotism, and belonging.”<sup>32</sup> This moment illustrates much about the workings of white supremacy, privilege, and status. To borrow from the theoretical framework established by W.E.B. Du Bois’s double consciousness, what is articulated in this moment is an irreconcilable twoness: “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings.”<sup>33</sup> Du Bois writes with critical specificity of the experience of black men in America. Though not written with a Muslim Iranian American woman in mind, his foundational scholarship on the racialized body and psyche offers much when reading this particular rhetoric utilized to reject Fara’s body. Though seated at the table, it is her hijab that speaks more loudly than any demand she can make. Though her labor is in service to the US state, she is kept as an outsider on the margins, made clear through the bank executive’s policing of her behavior as at odds with “*this country*.” Du Bois writes that “it is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”<sup>34</sup> To grapple with Fara’s rejection through the framework Du Bois provides allows us to question whether a point exists where she will be ever be perceived as American. Put differently, Du Bois highlights firmly that the issue is with the sight—“the eyes of others”—suggesting that Fara’s physical placement at the

table and the status given to her as an agent of the state are meaningless when measured by the rubric of white supremacy. This further speaks to the frustration regarding the legal categorization versus the lived reality of marginalization and racialization of Iranian Americans that Maghbouleh critically examines in her groundbreaking text *The Limits of Whiteness*.

### Scene Three

The fifth episode begins inside Javadi's car, though we do not see his face at first. He approaches a white male border agent adjacent to a sign that reads "Welcome to the United States." Then we see his face as he hands over his passport and speaks in an affected accent. He uses a pseudonym and is granted access into Vermont. When he reappears, it is at a meeting point with an unnamed Iranian American man who switches vehicles with him. The namelessness of the series of Iranian American men who namelessly aide in Javadi's mission says much about the show's shallow representation of Iranian American men. In the sixth episode, Javadi reappears in front of a large, white, and neatly landscaped home with an American flag on display. His American daughter-in-law opens the door and shortly after, he shoots her in the head. As he enters the home, a baby—his grandson Behrooz—cries in the background. His ex-wife, Fariba, enters the scene. In Farsi, he tells her that she made a mistake taking his son from him.<sup>35</sup> He breaks a wine bottle and uses it to fatally stab her in the neck over and over again. The scene is described as a "bloodbath."<sup>36</sup> It is a gruesome and violent scene that leaves Javadi covered in blood. As these scenes play out, Saul gives Fara an overview of his relationship with Javadi and his role in aiding Fariba's escape with their son from Iran in the aftermath of the revolution of 1979.

The ghost of 1979 is summoned to speak during a brief history lesson Saul compiles for Fara through photographs of the dead. By way of explaining the urgency of their capturing of Javadi, Saul shows Fara a series of photographs that display the murdered, bloody bodies of his victims.<sup>37</sup> The bodies Javadi murdered are those that were meant to be saved, to be safely removed from Iran at the moment of revolution because they were deemed an asset to the US. To clarify, Saul is not gesturing to the many bodies that were held in prison, that were executed in Iran before, during, and after the revolution—bodies that Fara would know, and would recognize. The bodies he mourns, and thus values and measures are those that were defined as more American than they were Iranian. Though decades have passed, the extent to which what happened in Iran in 1979 still haunts Saul is evident. As Fara meets Javadi for the first time and declares the economic crimes he has committed in English, he responds in Farsi.<sup>38</sup> Fara is seated opposite Javadi with Saul standing in the background. It is very clearly an interrogation room with spotlights lighting an otherwise dark room. She has a binder in front of her with several documents and explains a series of transactions. He ignores her fully, though staring at her, and says in English, "What is your point Saul? That I've been brought down by a girl?"<sup>39</sup> He then switches to Farsi and looks squarely at her, saying:

JAVADI: You should be ashamed of yourself. You work for the enemy.

FARA: These people are not the enemy.

JAVADI: So why are you dressed like this? As if this place is Tehran?<sup>40</sup>

Fara briefly responds before Saul interrupts and halts the conversation. This moment specifically illustrates how in an exchange with the only other Iranian (aside from her father), she is named as an enemy. Fara comes to occupy a duality, seen as an enemy by both, equally un-American and un-Iranian. And again here, her gendered physical presence becomes a marker for how she is defined. His immediate critique of her



underscores her gender and the marker her hijab signifies. This moment unfolds as Fara's dual rejection as she is once named as a traitor to the Islamic Republic of Iran and then simultaneously criticized for her choice to wear a hijab—a state-imposed and gendered symbol in Iran—outside of the borders of the country. More than that, his naming of her hijab has a particular significance in Iranian history, as veiling or unveiling has been and currently is imposed by the state's patriarchal power and control. This moment must be read within the specific historical context of Iran as it is not his questioning of her faith, but rather is an attempt to assert control or dominance over her appearance. As a consequence of how "discussions of the veil have more often than not been oversimplified by polemic or reductionism," it is important to note here that a population of women in Iran want to wear a hijab and a population of women in Iran do not want to be forced by the state to wear a hijab.<sup>41</sup> What should always be most critical is that women are at the center of this discussion rather than the state. Moreover, focusing singularly on the hijab ignores the complexity associated with women's lived realities in Iran, and overshadows many other issues such as equity, education, employment, healthcare, and among others. The state apparatus in Iran has made itself central to the determining of whether women can or cannot wear a hijab and Javadi's interjection is read here as drawing from a patriarchal attempt to further have power over Fara's decision. On this specific history within Iran, Farzaneh Milani writes,

An older woman in Iran today has been veiled by tradition in her youth, forcefully unveiled by government edict in 1936, and obligatorily revealed in 1983. In other words, the actual wearing of the veil has been imposed, withdrawn, and reimposed within a single lifetime. It is hard to imagine a more heavily charged symbol than the veil in the modern history of Iran.<sup>42</sup>

This becomes embodied in the two male characters seeking to define what her hijab means to them. For Saul, it is "that thing on her head" and his islamophobic gaze that associates her faith with violence. For Javadi, it is why she maintains it outside of the borders of Iran. Both of these interruptions or violent microaggressions undermine and erase Fara's ability to be. The focus is never on her. The focus is always on the marker this represents and how it makes those around her feel.

As for Javadi's switch between languages, it is critical to note that I only have access to this conversation because I understand Farsi. The director made the decision to not translate into subtitles the loud, intense exchange between Fara and Javadi. While I can only guess at the reasons this choice was made, the consequence of the decision to keep this moment foreign achieves a couple of results that are interesting for this discussion. First, to return to the ideal spectator, I am not it. This was not meant for me to see. Secondly, in terms of Fara, it continues to portray her as an object of suspicion, but it also denies her the occasion to speak. In this way, it is not about what is really being said, but rather what it is meant to represent. Iran, and Iranians speaking loudly, become a synecdoche that would and should be recognizable to an audience that does not have access to the translation. This moment triggers a particular cultural memory about Iran, and Iranians speaking loudly.

What this suggests is that any reference to Iran or Iranians speaking loudly in a public space resurrects for a US audience the ghost of 1979. The ghost is a reminder that haunts. It is to say that Iran is frequently positioned as an enemy of the US. The origin for this dysfunctional relationship is—from the American and Western perspective—the 1979 hostage crisis. For Iranians, it is always about more than this, as their relationship precedes this historical moment. The fact that the CIA-led coup d'état that overthrew democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh is rarely mentioned or



even known by many Americans is evidence of historical erasure that undermines a more complicated or nuanced approach to history. Historian David Farber writes of 1979,

Yet, as measured by public concern, emotional outpouring, and simple fascination, the Iran Hostage crisis captivated the American people more than any other of the era's difficulties. By the millions Americans expressed their ongoing solidarity with the families. They wrote letters of sympathy to the hostages and their families. They wrapped yellow ribbons around trees in their front yards, pinned them on their clothes, tied them to their car antennas as symbols of concern for the hostages' plight. [Through] television talk shows, evening news, drive-time radio, and almost every other forum of public conversation, Americans followed the latest twist and turns of the Americans' captivity in Iran. The nation, itself, was held hostage by the crisis.<sup>43</sup>

The continued visual exposure to an incident that marked the nation as vulnerable deeply disrupted notions of national superiority and safety held by many. Television figured importantly into the ossifying of this cultural memory as, "night after night, until the 444<sup>th</sup> night when the hostages were at last freed, Walter Cronkite counted the days of America's humiliation, feeding Americans' angry preoccupation with the Iranian hostage-takers and their captives."<sup>44</sup>

This particular scene questions to what extent this "angry preoccupation" has dissipated. In other words, what happens to an "angry preoccupation" over time? For Iranians who fled Iran in the aftermath of the revolution, or who were already here, as "by the mid-1970s, in fact, there were more foreign students from Iran in American universities than any other national group," this anger became translated onto their physical presence.<sup>45</sup> As though personally responsible for the act of hostage-taking, Iranians who attempted to create a new home in America discovered in various ways that they were marked as the singular enemy. Farber introduces a metaphor to describe this historical moment on the American psyche, writing, "The hostage-taking was an open wound on the American body politic and the press, politicians, and the American people could not leave it alone."<sup>46</sup> To describe this moment in history with the metaphor of an open wound is telling and provocative. One could argue that this wound, not properly tended to for the last thirty-nine years, remains infected. There was no resolution to the hostage situation. Certainly, the men and women who endured the unimaginable 444 days in captivity were released and returned to the US. Many of them have written about their experiences. At no point since has Iran been able to come out from underneath this static image. Iran has never shifted from the position of dubious enemy.

How, after nearly forty years, does this event impact the way American's view Iran? Some would say that so much time has passed. Yet, it is worth noting that a large portion of the Americans protesting during the crisis, holding up signs that read "Deport ALL Iranians," were college-aged. Then in their twenties, this generation of Americans, which grew up in and around this display of hate for all from a specific country, is now only in their sixties. In fact, as Iranians represented the largest population of international students on US campuses during this time, the college campus was a site where much of this hatred played out. That generation's attitude is evident through the statistic that "Ten years after the revolution, a Gallup poll determined that the percentage of Americans who had an unfavorable opinion toward Iran increased from 60 percent in 1980 to 91 percent by 1989."<sup>47</sup> Iranian American children growing up in this decade, when 91 percent of the country had an unfavorable opinion toward Iran, were taught to answer if asked that they were Persian instead of Iranian as a way to side-step the penetration of hate. That atmosphere is illustrated through the media representation of the US attack on and downing of Iran Air Flight 655 on July 3, 1988, killing all of the 290 souls aboard including

66 infants and children. Of the tragedy, then President Reagan called it an “understandable accident.”<sup>48</sup> How, I wonder, did Iranian parents explain this—and the national celebrations that occurred on the following day—to their US-born children? It is exhibited in Reza Aslan’s admission that as a child in the 1980s, he “just told everybody [he] was Mexican.” Aslan explains, “It was very important that we kept the whole Muslim and Iranian thing on the down-low as much as possible.”<sup>49</sup> The maintenance of this static image of Iran is evident through the specific language chosen by then President Bush in 2002, including Iran in what he called an “axis of evil.” The static image is underscored by Rahimieh and Karim in their 2008 *MELUS* introduction cited at the beginning of this essay, describing Iranian Americans’ “anxieties about their national affiliation.”<sup>50</sup> It is made clear through Asghar Farhadi’s 2012 Golden Globe acceptance speech for his film, *A Separation*, when he described Iranians on an American stage by saying “I prefer to just say something about my people. I think they are a truly loving people.”<sup>51</sup> Farhadi speaks into the expectation placed upon Iranians and Iranian Americans that he hopes to disrupt by humanizing his people. It is evident through the rhetoric surrounding the Iran Nuclear Deal, and the subsequent dismantling of the Iran Nuclear Deal. It is noticeable when, on a morning news show to discuss her fashion blog, Hoda Katebi is asked to share her thoughts on nuclear weapons.<sup>52</sup> It is evident in a statement made about the dismantling of the deal, when the current President specifically said, “America will not be held *hostage* to nuclear blackmail. We will not allow American cities to be threatened with destruction. And we will not allow a regime that chants “Death to America” to gain access to the most deadly weapons on Earth.”<sup>53</sup> It is evident in a black and white poster featuring Ted Cruz’s face photoshopped onto a shirtless, muscular, and tattooed body with a limp cigarette in his mouth and the words “Iran’s Worst Nightmare” in bold font. It was clear on the day I gave birth to my son, when my labor and delivery nurse tilted her head to the side, and asked me where I was from before sharing her anecdotes about protesting the hostage crisis. All this to say, as a country, as a government, as a body of people, and as a diaspora, Iran and by extension—Iranians and Iranian Americans—have been for the last thirty-nine years frozen in a specific cultural memory. This litany—which is much abridged—illustrates the way that 1979 continues to haunt as well as the swiftness with which bodies rendered foreign are made to stand in for the government. Thus, when the choice is made to leave this scene untranslated, there is an expectation of how the audience would respond.

## Scene Four

Fara learns that Javadi—instead of being held responsible for his crimes (that she recognizes as being committed against both the US and Iran)—will be reintegrated back into Iran, where he will perform the role of a double-agent, infiltrating the Islamic Republic to pursue US interests. In response to the news that he will be planted back into the government to act as an undercover agent, Fara exclaims, “Was this always the plan?” Her question is unnoticed and unanswered so she must repeat herself. Finally, Carrie responds, informing Fara, “well, you should be proud. Your work made it all possible.”<sup>54</sup>

In the eighth episode, the shot focuses on Fara sitting in a parking lot. Her facial expressions illustrate confusion and frustration. She looks distracted. She then turns on her engine and reverses out of the parking spot. When she reappears on screen, she pulls into a residential driveway. As she enters the home, the shot focuses only on the lower half of her body. She removes her shoes and places them near several others by the front door. The audience sees several Persian rugs on the floor and hears Persian music playing in the background. From the music to the furniture to the abundance of photographs, the space appears very much invested in the maintenance of a connection to a homeland. Fara moves across the room to turn off the music. It is clear that as Fara begins to digest not

only what it might mean to occupy the position of as an agent of the state but also the inconsistency of justice occurring around her, she is unable to attend work. After the in-home nurse caring for her father leaves the home, Fara pushes off her hijab as she begins to speak with her father. What is most interesting about this particular exchange is that he speaks in Farsi while she consistently responds in English. Though this scene is untranslated, it differs from the scene between she and Javadi as her responses in English make his comments perceivable. She also continues to demand that he speak English instead of Farsi. When he finally does say something in English, it is a derogatory statement that reveals his prejudice towards people of Arab descent. Thus far in this season, not a singular Iranian man is illustrated outside of a negative trope.

Later, their doorbell rings and a white man in a suit appears at her front door. Before she can say anything, he says her name as though reading off a piece of paper. After giving her his business card and identifying himself as a CIA agent, he asks to enter the home. Their brief exchange is as follows:

AGENT: You called in sick two days in a row, is something the matter?

FARA: Migraines.

AGENT: Yet you drove to work yesterday.

FARA: Yes.

AGENT: Where you sat in the parking lot for over half an hour before deciding to leave again.

FARA: I was hoping that it would go away.<sup>55</sup>

His unannounced and uninvited entrance into her home space illustrates the unlimited expanse of his power as well as the threat if she does not comply. The aching feeling that Fara experiences of being continually under surveillance is palatable. The feeling of “hoping that it would go away” becomes symbolic of the anxiety of simultaneously “embracing and disavowal” of an aspect of her identity.<sup>56</sup> The feeling is also symbolic of her recognizing that her presence within the CIA is a direct result of this specific aspect of her identity that marks her as a continual suspect. The man’s entrance into her home is critical because it illustrates that there is no way she can fully extract herself from the role she performs. He then says to her, “Director Berenson has shown an unusual degree of confidence in you, Ms. Shirazi, and trusted you in matters of national importance. But your current state of mind makes your loyalty to him—and to the agency a live issue.”<sup>57</sup> Here, again, he reminds her of what Saul demanded earlier. Fara “better be the best analyst” because that is the only explanation for her presence. The question of her loyalty also speaks to the dubious gaze always applied to her body.

The element and weight of surveillance is connected to her occupation within the CIA, but also to her identity and status as a Muslim Iranian American. Certainly, surveillance has had a significant presence in specific communities in a post-9/11 US. Deepa Iyer explains that, “From New York to California, South Asian, Muslim, and Arab communities have lived under institutional surveillance by their own government.”<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, Iyer writes, “Most Americans take for granted the ability to worship freely, attend public demonstrations, and meet friends at their favorite restaurants to watch a sports game. But for Muslim, Arab and South Asian community members, these routine actions have potentially dangerous consequences.”<sup>59</sup> For Fara, her choice to call in sick to work, an American ritual, is monitored and makes evident that any action she takes—no matter how commonplace or mundane—is to be under surveillance.

The suspicion placed upon her body speaks to how what is socially acceptable translates into what becomes legally acceptable treatment of specific bodies. Most recently, the various iterations of the executive order issuing a travel ban impacts Iranians and Iranian Americans like Fara, and will be discussed later in this essay. Prior to this current administration, Maghbouleh writes,

Although no Iranian nationals were involved in the planning or execution of the September 11 terrorist attacks, from 2002 through 2011 a special migrant National Security Entry Exit Registration System (NSEERS) required all Iranian and Iranian American men to present themselves for registration with the Department of Homeland Security.<sup>60</sup>

That Maghbouleh must begin by noting that no Iranians were involved in the attacks on 9/11 is significant. This connects to anecdotal evidence by Iranian Americans themselves who cite this fact in public spaces as though it will remove decades of marginalization and suspicion placed upon their bodies. It is critical to recall that this has a particular history as “Iran continues to arouse seething passions in Americans . . . as a result of the incredibly detailed, highly focused attention of the media to the [hostage situation of 1979] and Iran’s demonization for years after it.”<sup>61</sup> When the man at her front door questions her loyalty, it is not just about Fara calling in sick, it is about how she can never maneuver outside of the suspicion placed upon her body as an Iranian American and as a Muslim woman.

## Scene Five

As a consequence of the uninvited home visit, Fara is forced to reveal to her father that she does not work at a bank but is instead a language specialist for the CIA. In defense of her decision, she explains, “Baba, an attack happened.” Her father responds by vehemently reminding her that her actions have implications in Iran, pleading: “we still have family in Tehran! Your uncle, his wife and children! They will be added to the list to be hanged!” Her response illustrates a significant turning point. When she says “I’m an American,” she implies a complete disavowal and defines herself solely by her allegiance to the US.<sup>62</sup> Her verbal naming of herself in this moment, in this way, imagines that she cannot be both American and Iranian. Through her declaration, she names the death of an aspect of her identity as well as the impossibility of being both.

Certainly, this moment explores the tensions associated with generational differences and much can be said about the father’s understanding of the stakes of any level of political involvement from the entirety of his life in Iran. But there is more in this scene than simply the disparate political beliefs consequential to generational positionality. Through the threat of literal death, this scene examines the life of assimilation. Broadly, assimilation is most often understood in terms of that which is gained: a process by which an individual adapts to or adopts the practices, behavior, language, and culture of a dominant group (for survival). What is missing from this definition is the extent of loss associated with the process of assimilation. It becomes, in many ways, a death or irretrievable loss that is shaped by the circumstances of one’s migration. If, as Beydoun’s definition of islamophobia suggests, her being Muslim is associated with being “inherently violent, alien, and unassimilable,” then she cannot be both Iranian and American. This is the precise tension that leads to what Rahimieh and Karim refer to as the “embracing and disavowal”<sup>63</sup>

Throughout their presence in the US, Iranian Americans have documented their experiences of othering and racialization through memoirs, fiction, visual art, and poetry, among other mediums. In her poem “Ain’t No American Beauty Rose” (1999), Tara Fatemi

explicates the afterlife of this “open wound” through the experiences of an Iranian American child. I have chosen to include Fatemi’s poem in full because the short poem succinctly narrates the layered tensions that emerge from this ossified cultural memory and the impact this has on Iranian Americans decades later:

dirty  
brown  
ugly  
weed  
I am  
responsible  
for American  
hostages  
ten years  
I cultivate  
courage  
to be myself  
plant seeds  
for pride  
in heritage  
man cackles  
*Shave your eyebrows*  
*fuckin’*  
*A-rab!*  
thick eyebrows  
of my mother  
grandmother  
I want to pluck  
all ancestry  
his scythed  
tongue  
bleeds me.<sup>64</sup>

Throughout the poem is an awareness of how the body is being read. Though young, it is clear that the child is introduced through the terms and values placed upon her body: “dirty/brown/ugly/weed.” To be a weed is to be unwanted and to be seen as an invasive nuisance that threatens the intentional garden. To claim responsibility for the “American hostages” illustrates the inability for an Iranian American to “come clean” or “strip down through the layers of attenuated meanings.”<sup>65</sup> The poet writes about a young child

working to cultivate, to grow intentionally with “courage” or “pride” only to have it ruptured by a moment of (mis)recognition. Here, again, the child’s body is being read. In this case, the child is misrecognized as Arab, though Fatemi illustrates how this misreading does not distract from the racist project of dehumanizing the child. In this scene of *Homeland*, the ghost of 1979 is alluded to first through the photographs and secondly through the choice not to translate the Iranians speaking loudly. The ghost gestures to the audience, signaling what they are expected to recognize: that the bodies are “responsible/for American hostages” and are meant to be read as suspicious always. In the poem, this cultural memory functions as a ghost, haunting a child’s possibility to grow beyond the burdensome confines of historical weight. Similarly, in this scene, the possibility to reckon with Fara’s complex personhood is overshadowed by the reading of her only through her proximity to the history of 1979.

My inclusion of the poem and my reading of this scene explores the feeling of unbelonging that festers for those whose migration has disrupted the imagined trajectory of one’s life, culture, heritage, safety, permanence, language, and sensibilities. Locating this temporal interruption as part and parcel of the Iranian diasporic experience, this scene identifies a particular collective displacement. This critical moment unearths the dynamic tension between Fara and her father. There is a particular type of cultural memory associated with migration that comes with the impossibility of ever returning. It is so important that her father immediately cites the possibility of death because it illustrates two points that are necessary to better understanding the father’s complex personhood—though he appears reductively simplified in these two short scenes. The first is the severity of death and the second is the fact that this is always on his mind—lingering on the tip of his tongue, waiting to be released. This is something that Iranian Americans, though not the ideal spectator, will recognize. Although continents away, the movement is always restricted. This is what it means to be Iranian in America. In this way, this exchange between Fara and her father speaks to the way that the past endlessly shapes the present for Iranian Americans. Fara’s declaration interrupts this. Her claiming ownership of the history of the attack as personal, disrupts and severs the waiting or longing for an elsewhere place. Which is shaped by a past, but not the past or future her father speaks of. This scene and the agent’s entering of her home, discussed in the previous scene, exhibits what the ability to move back and forth across borders says about power.

## Scene Six

Fara makes her final appearance of the season in the last five minutes of the tenth episode. Working alone in a dark room, only the silhouette of her body is able to be seen, foreshadowing her death.<sup>66</sup> Her face is almost entirely cloaked in the darkness of the room. As Carrie enters the room, we see what she sees in both this moment, and perhaps all along: a shadow or dark shape. This moment speaks to the way that Fara is an object of gaze throughout the season. A shot illustrates Carrie as she pauses to gaze at Fara before entering, and before Fara knows that she is there. Carrie enters to speak with her:

CARRIE: Fara, you are one of the few people in the building that know that Mahjid Javadi is an agency asset.

FARA: I didn’t breathe a word to anybody.

Fara’s immediate response of “I didn’t breathe a word to anybody” underscores her permanent feeling of anxiety, of always already being read as a suspect. Carrie invites Fara even further into the interior, but as a cost, explaining that “Javadi is only half the play, there is another phase” and that the remainder of the operation will take place in Iran. Carrie’s request is clear as she says,

CARRIE: Fara, you have an uncle in Tehran, your father's brother...

FARA: No. You are asking me to put my family at extreme risk. You know you are. You forget I know firsthand how an operation can go sour. Tell the truth. You would never ask your own family to do this.

CARRIE: I might. And from what I know about your uncle, he is not one to cross the street to stay out of trouble's way.

FARA: He is a member of a moderate opposition group. Not a bomb thrower.

CARRIE: All we need is a place to meet in the city—a defacto safe house. Fara, we have a brother agent in the field, soon to be in mortal danger. Don't we owe him every chance to get out alive?"<sup>67</sup>

Carrie's reply is telling. The specificity of her language, and in particular, invoking the word "brother" exudes a level of inclusion as well as manipulation. The "operation" to which Fara refers is the killings of Fariba and her daughter-in-law that were seen as collateral damage. Moreover, Carrie's indication that she already knows about Fara's uncle's politics illustrates the expanse of their power over all aspects of her life. Secondly, this moment amplifies Fara's role as an agent of the state as both her technical skills and body are consumed. The "brother" in question is Brody, the ex-marine mentioned at the beginning of this essay. The framing of what is owed to Brody is interesting to consider as it exhibits what is owed to a singular white man in peril in Iran compared to what is owed to Fara, a Muslim Iranian American in the US. Put differently, her body is seen as expendable in ways that his are not. Even more, the lives of her family must be put at risk to save his. The fact that the scene cuts before she is able to answer implies that Carrie was not asking, she was demanding, and Fara must involve her family. In this final moment, the ways in which she and her body are utilized to move the plot forward is made clear.

## Conclusion

Although some may contend that as a form of entertainment, a television series and the images it circulates should not be given much regard, let alone serve as the subject of serious study, I argue that in their devotion to marketing realness, and by that I mean, their dogged attempt to illustrate the based-on-a-true story component of their narratives, the creators and writers of *Homeland* actively pursue a blurred line between fantasy and fact.<sup>68</sup> It is critical to note that for some viewers, Fara might be the only Iranian or Muslim person they know. In the hybrid space of historical fact and generous fantasy in which they emerge, programs like *Homeland*—or the film *Argo* or the series *24* or the series *Scandal* or the more recent HBO series *Here and Now*—begin to constitute and replace the actual narratives on which they claim to be based. In other words, these performances stage a fictional realness and consequently gain both power and longevity as audiences digest images that purposely disguise their existence as a form of entertainment. The slippage of fact and fiction are swiftly woven together so that an audience consumes both without a clear distinction between the two.

Put simply, for racially marginalized and vulnerable bodies, there are immensely high stakes in representation of any form. There is a connection between the narratives on television programs and the news insofar as viewers are left with a notion of knowing or understanding without concern for the sweeping reductions of complex personhood. Edward Said writes of the news, suggesting:

[This coverage] has given consumers of news the sense that they have understood Islam without at the same time intimating to them that a great deal in this energetic coverage is based on far from objective material. In many



instances 'Islam' has licensed not only patent inaccuracy but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural and even racial hatred, deep yet paradoxically free-floating hostility.<sup>69</sup>

The stakes do not just pertain to knowledge production, but to how that knowledge that is often shallowly produced shapes what treatment becomes measured as socially and legally acceptable.

Though much of this essay drew attention to the ghost of 1979, it is critical to frame this also within the present restrictions placed upon Iranians and Iranian Americans. The Supreme Court Decision in *Trump v. Hawaii* (2018) is worth exploring here to better understand the implications of the decision rendered as well as the historical comparisons made in the official Opinion of the Court.<sup>70</sup> The Syllabus describes the case: "In September 2017, the President issued Proclamation No. 9645, seeking to improved vetting procedures for foreign nationals traveling to the United States by identifying ongoing deficiencies in the information needed to assess whether nationals of particular countries present a security threat."<sup>71</sup> What is left out of the sterile overview of this case is the humanity of the countless lives so frivolously upended when the current President issued his first executive order one week into his term. Stories of grandparents stranded in airports, individuals left without necessary medical care or access, loved ones separated without a clear reasoning or explanation are missing from this description. The travel ban has experienced various iterations with countries sometimes added to the list and sometimes removed. Iran has consistently been on list.<sup>72</sup> The Supreme Court case was framed as one that focused on presidential powers, but woven throughout the statements and documents pertaining to the case are continual references to anti-Muslim animus that shaped the establishment of this particular executive order. In the Opinion of the Court, Chief Justice Roberts cites the President's clear anti-Muslim rhetoric, but states that "The Proclamation, moreover, is facially neutral toward religion" and furthermore, "The text says nothing about religion."<sup>73</sup> In other words, because the words "Muslim" or "Islam" are not explicitly included in the order and because over the course of its many iterations Muslim-majority countries have been removed from the list, it is argued that the intent is "neutral." Even more, the inclusion of non-Muslim-majority countries is utilized as evidence that this not targeted at Muslims. As Justice Sotomayor argues below, the public perception of this as a "Muslim Travel Ban" is drawn directly from the current President's own language that suggest a desire to ban Muslims from entering the US.

In the Dissenting Opinion offered by Justice Sotomayor, with Justice Ginsburg joining, the anti-Muslim rhetoric that the current President exhibited during his campaign and continues to exhibit during his term makes quite clear the impetus for the order. Justice Sotomayor argues for the impossibility of separating the very clear anti-Muslim rhetoric from this executive order citing, "The full record paints a far more harrowing picture, from which a reasonable observer would readily conclude that the Proclamation was motivated by a hostility and animus towards the Muslim faith."<sup>74</sup> Even more, while the Chief Justice Roberts held that the comparisons made to the internment of Japanese Americans was not comparable to this case, Justice Sotomayor notes that "on December 8, 2015 Trump justified his proposal during a television interview by noting that President Franklin D. Roosevelt 'did the same thing' with respect to the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II."<sup>75</sup> In his own words, the current President likened his travel ban to the internment of Japanese Americans. In her opinion, Justice Sotomayor enumerated several incidents that could not be overlooked in the decision in the case, noting first that "while litigation over EO-2 was ongoing, President Trump repeatedly made statements alluding to a desire to keep Muslims out of the country."<sup>76</sup> Secondly, that

“On November 29, 2017, President Trump ‘retweeted’ three anti-Muslim videos, entitled ‘Muslim Destroys a Statue of Virgin Mary!’, ‘Islamist mob pushes teenage boy off roof and beats him to death!’, and ‘Muslim migrant beats up Dutch boy on crutches!’”<sup>77</sup>

The question as the court framed it was not whether to denounce his rhetoric, but whether he was acting within his powers as President to make such an order. We must ask how it is possible that the transparent and consistent language used to dehumanize an entire group of people is to be cast aside and ignored. “A reasonable observer,” wrote Justice Sotomayor, “would conclude that the Proclamation was driven primarily by anti-Muslim animus, rather than by the Government’s asserted national-security justifications.”<sup>78</sup> In her concluding statements, Justice Sotomayor makes plain the urgency and relevance in resisting any legislature or government-endorsed policies that are steeped in discrimination, even when cloaked by neutral language. She concludes:

The First Amendment stands as a bulwark against official religious prejudice and embodies our Nation’s deep commitment to religious plurality and tolerance . . . . Instead of vindicating those principles, today’s decision tosses them aside. In holding that the First Amendment gives way to an executive policy that a reasonable observer would view as motivated by animus against Muslims, the majority opinion upends this Court’s precedent, repeats tragic mistakes of the past, and denies countless individuals the fundamental right of religious liberty.”<sup>79</sup>

In what ways does this Supreme Court decision, like the ever present suspicion placed upon Fara’s body, actually further establish an impenetrable binary between American and outsider? In what ways does this decision connect directly to Fara’s first moment onscreen, showing her identification clearly amidst stares and the feeling that she should be watched? How does this decision further connect to what Rahimieh and Karim define as a “community’s anxieties around their national affiliation?” In what ways does this deny Iranian Americans, among the other groups targeted, the full rights of citizenship? In other words, when legislature defines one’s body as other, when it creates separate laws to impact specific bodies, how does this shape one’s lived experience? Can the impact ever be known?

Ours is a history of separation. In every Iranian American family is the story of a relative that remains on the other side of the world: grandmothers who have not yet met their grandchildren, mothers who have not seen their sons in thirty years. Marriages uncelebrated and funerals unattended. In response to the travel ban, Persis Karim writes of her own family member who has

missed countless definitive moments in the lives of our family—births, marriages, deaths. It has never been easy for Iranians who scattered around the globe after the revolution. Nearly 3 million Iranians have immigrated to the United States alone since 1979, and countless political escalations between this country and Iran have left them in physical, emotional and legal limbo. This “travel ban” implemented by this administration is yet more of the same, and even worse; at its core, the executive order is designed to divide and separate individuals, families, and nations, and it continues the long arc of animosity and stereotyping that has little to do with the everyday lives of Iranians and Iranian Americans.<sup>80</sup>

Since 1979, there has been an uncontested repetition around the narrative of Iran and Iranians in the American imaginary. In this way, the hidden meaning as it relates to the character Fara, and her treatment as a human being, would reveal that she cannot exist as

she is denied access to both a home and a land. Fara is at once exposed to a level of suspicion and maltreatment as a simple consequence of her race, religion, and gender, while at the same time she is utilized as a resource that ultimately contributes to the demise or precarious position of individuals to whom she is related. Fara occupies a somewhat impossible position because while she is privy to interior spaces, she is not privy to the political, economic or social privileges that the others enjoy.

While Fara is welcomed inside the space of the CIA and brought into the interior, she is always already looked at as a threat. To borrow from Laura Mulvey, “going far beyond highlighting a woman’s to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself.”<sup>81</sup> The gaze focused on her is always dubious, as the very aspect of her identity that allows her entrance as an expert also defines her as a threat. While she must denounce any affiliation with Iran, she is simultaneously kept on the margins in the US. She is never exonerated of her suspect-status, evident in her inability to officially mourn. The title itself, *Homeland*, cannot possibly apply to Fara, as she is denied both the security of a new home and the identification with a former land.

## Notes

1. Persis Karim and Nasrin Rahimieh, “Writing Iranian Americans into the American Literature Canon,” *MELUS* 33, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 9–10. [↗](#)
2. Roshanak Kheshti, “Can the Memoirist Speak? Representing Iranian Women, Gender, and Sexuality in Recent Popular and Scholarly Publications,” *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 1 (2012): 51. [↗](#)
3. Kheshti, “Can the Memoirist Speak,” 51; Karim and Rahimieh, “Writing Iranian Americans,” 9–10. The character of Fara is played by British-Iranian actress Nazanin Boniadi. [↗](#)
4. While this paper focuses exclusively on Fara and how she is discarded as a character after this moment season three, it should be noted that she reappears as a member of Carrie’s team in season four when the group is stationed in Islamabad. She is murdered by Haissam Haqqani (played by Numan Acar) in Episode 10, titled “13 hours in Islamabad” and her death goes largely unmourned with the exception of her one teammate, Max (played by Maury Sterling). Her assignment on Carrie’s team, her movement to Islamabad, and her removal of her hijab in season four receives no attention or explanation in the show. I have chosen to focus exclusively on her character’s arc in season three because it illustrates the particular tension she experiences as a Muslim woman in America, though much can be said about how her character is written and discarded in season four. [↗](#)
5. I make the argument that there is an ossified public memory about Iran and Iranians that stems from this historical moment and the hostage crisis that began on November 4, 1979 and lasted 444 days operates like a ghost that continues to haunt the present. For more extensive details about this historical moment and the media representations of it, see: Karim and Rahimieh, “Writing Iranian Americans into the American Literature Canon”; David Farber, *Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America’s First Encounter with Radical Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); or Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1997) [↗](#)
6. In its most recent iteration, the list of banned countries includes two non-Muslim-majority countries. This fact is often utilized to refute the perception of the ban as a “Muslim Travel Ban.” [↗](#)
7. Jorie Lagerwey and Diane Negra, “Analyzing *Homeland*: Introduction,” *Cinema Journal* 54, no. 4 (Summer 2015): 126–131 [↗](#)
8. Lagerwey and Negra, “Analyzing *Homeland*,” 126. [↗](#)

9. Lagerwey and Negra, "Analyzing *Homeland*," 131. [↗](#)
10. Alex Bevan, "The National Body, Women, and Mental Health in *Homeland*," *Cinema Journal* 54, no. 4 (Summer 2015), 145–151. [↗](#)
11. Lindsay Steenberg and Yvonne Tasker, "'Pledge Allegiance': Gendered Surveillance, Crime Television, and *Homeland*," *Cinema Journal* 54, no. 4 (Summer 2015): 132–198. [↗](#)
12. Stephen Shapiro, "*Homeland*'s Crisis of Middle-Class Transformation," *Cinema Journal* 54, no. 4 (Summer 2015): 152–158. [↗](#)
13. James Castonguay, "Fictions of Terror: Complexity, Complicity and Insecurity in *Homeland*," *Cinema Journal* 54, no. 4 (Summer 2015): 139–144. [↗](#)
14. Castonguay, "Fictions of Terror," 143. [↗](#)
15. Kimberlé Crenshaw is credited with the naming and development of the theoretical frameworks of both intersectionality and critical race theory. On the inception of critical race theory, Mari Matsuda writes, "Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw began calling what radical law professors of color were doing 'critical race theory' when she organized a retreat at a spartan, convent in the summer of 1989. It was 'critical' both because we criticized and because we respected and drew on the tradition of postmodern critical thought then popular with left intellectuals. It was 'race' theory because we were, both by personal circumstance and through our understanding of history convinced that racism and the construction of race were central to understanding of American law and politics. As legal theory, critical race theory uncovers racist structures within the legal system and asks how and whether law is a means to attain justice." See Mari Matsuda, "Critical Race Theory," in *Where is Your Body: And Other Essays on Race, Gender, and the Law* (Boston: Beacon, 1996). [↗](#)
16. Allia Ida Griffin, "On the Burden of Proof: Racialized Violence and the Limits of Public Mourning," *contemporary*. August 17, 2017. [↗](#)
17. See Maytha Alhassan's recent study, "Haqq and Hollywood: Illuminating 100 Years of Muslim Tropes and How to Transform Them," *Pop Culture Collaborative*, accessed October 1, 2018, <https://popcollab.org/haqq-and-hollywood/>. See also Evelyn Alsultany *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation After 9/11* (New York: NYU Press, 2012). [↗](#)
18. "Uh...Oh...Ah...," *Homeland*, season 3, episode 2, written by Chip Johannessen, directed by Lesli Linka Glatter, Showtime, 2013. [↗](#)
19. Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2012), 291. [↗](#)
20. "Uh...Oh...Ah...," *Homeland*, season 3, episode 2, written by Chip Johannessen, directed by Lesli Linka Glatter, Showtime, 2013. [↗](#)
21. See, for example, Nima Naghibi's *Rethinking Global Sisterhood: Western Feminism and Iran* (2007), Farzaneh Milani's *Veils and Words: Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, 1992), or Minoo Moallem's *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran* (2005). [↗](#)
22. Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," in *The Black Feminist Reader*, ed. Joy James and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2000), 203. [↗](#)
23. Khaled Beydoun, *American Islamophobia* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 28. [↗](#)

24. Mona El-Ghabashy, "Quandaries of Representation," in *Arab & Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, & Belonging*, ed. Rabab Abdulhadi, Evelyn Alsultany, and Nadine Naber (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011). [↗](#)
25. "Uh...Oh...Ah...," *Homeland*, season 3, episode 2, written by Chip Johannessen, directed by Lesli Linka Glatter, Showtime, 2013. [↗](#)
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27. Michael Eric Dyson, "Foreward: Keyser Söze, Beyoncé, and the Witness Protection Program," in *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Race* (Boston: Beacon, 2018), ix. [↗](#)
28. Michael Eric Dyson, *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America* (New York: St. Martins, 2017), 46. [↗](#)
29. Dyson, "Foreward," xi. [↗](#)
30. Neda Maghbouleh, *The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 5. [↗](#)
31. Maghbouleh, *The Limits of Whiteness*, 18-24. [↗](#)
32. Beydoun. *American Islamophobia*, 119. [↗](#)
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34. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 8. [↗](#)
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37. "Still Positive," *Homeland*, season 3, episode 6, written by Alexander Cary, directed by Lesli Linka Glatter, Showtime, 2013. [↗](#)
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39. "Gerontion," *Homeland*, season 3, episode 7, written by Chip Johannessen, directed by Carl Franklin, Showtime, 2013. [↗](#)
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63. Karim and Rahimieh, "Writing Iranian Americans," 9–10. [↗](#)
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65. Spillers, "Mama's Baby," 203. [↗](#)
66. Fara Shirazi appears in season four before being brutally murdered. This is the last moment she speaks or is referred to during season three. [↗](#)
67. "Good Night," *Homeland*, season 3, episode 10, written by Keith Gordon, directed by Alexander Cary and Charlotte Stoudt, Showtime, 2013. [↗](#)
68. Much can be said about how the opening sequence sets up this blurred line by drawing from actual footage of historical incidents and speech by multiple US Presidents. [↗](#)
69. Said. *Covering Islam*, li. [↗](#)
70. Of the three plaintiffs represented in this case, one was Iranian American with relatives in Iran. [↗](#)
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[Bio](#)

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